

Bingham, Mary Lily Kenan Flagler ^[1]

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Bingham, Mary Lily Kenan Flagler

By T. S. Kenan III, 1979

14 June 1867–27 July 1917

Mary Bingham, philanthropist, was born in Kenansville at Liberty Hall, her grandfather's home. She was the daughter of [William Rand Kenan](#) ^[2] and Mary Hargrave and the eldest of four children. Her brother and sisters were William R., Jr., Jessie Kenan Wise, and [Sarah Graham](#) ^[3]. She was raised in [Wilmington](#) ^[4] and later entered [Peace College](#) ^[5] in Raleigh, where she majored in piano and voice.

On 24 Aug. 1901 she was married to Henry Morrison Flagler in Kenansville. Flagler was a cofounder of the Standard Oil Company, with John D. Rockefeller, and also became the prime developer of the Florida east coast. Mrs. Flagler took an active interest in her husband's vast business affairs. When he died in 1913, she assumed many of his charitable interests, such as hospitals, churches, and schools. She maintained homes in New York and Florida but spent considerable time in Raleigh, where she visited her aunt and uncle, Colonel and Mrs. Thomas S. Kenan.

In December 1916, Mrs. Flagler married [Robert Worth Bingham](#) ^[6] of Louisville, Ky., but in July 1917 she died suddenly at her home in Louisville, leaving an estate of almost \$100 million. One of the most important bequests was a trust fund known as the Kenan Professorship Fund, which annually supplements the salaries of the distinguished Kenan professors. Mrs. Bingham also set up a trust fund to protect and develop her Florida properties, including the [Florida East Coast Railroad](#) ^[7], [Florida East Coast Hotel Company](#) ^[8], Miami Power and Water Company, Model Land Company, and P. & O. Steamship Company. Her Palm Beach, Fla., estate, [Whitehall](#) ^[9], is now a museum open to the public.

A portrait of Mrs. Bingham hangs in the Henry Morrison Flagler Museum in Palm Beach, Fla., and another is in [Kenan Dormitory](#) ^[10] at [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[11]. Mrs. Bingham died childless and was buried in Oakdale Cemetery in Wilmington. She had attended the [Presbyterian church](#) ^[12].

References:

Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union* , 28 July 1917

Kenan Family Records (in possession of the author)

W. R. Kenan, ed., *Incidents by the Way* (1946)

New York *News* , 28 July 1917; A.K. Register, ed., *The Kenan Family* (1967)

St. Augustine (Fla.) *Record* , 28 July 1917

Additional Resources:

Flagler Museum: <http://www.flaglermuseum.us/> ^[9]

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